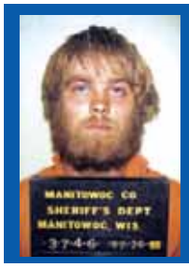

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Shocking allegations

THE INSIDE JOB

The Ottawa Hospital alleges two of its former employees concocted a scheme with a group of contractors, **including:**

- **Luxury fishing trips**
- **Stays in expensive hotels**
- **A trip to San Francisco and Napa Valley**

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Hospital alleges kickbacks

COURT

Contractor calls lawsuit a 'fishing expedition'

Haley Ritchie
Metro | Ottawa

The Ottawa Hospital has filed a civil lawsuit and notified police of an alleged kickback scheme involving the hospital's procurement policies. JOE LOFARO/METRO

Shocking allegations have surfaced about a massive kickback scheme at the Ottawa Hospital.

The hospital is alleging that two of its former directors paid inflated prices to certain contractors, gave them insider information on upcoming projects and helped rig bids in their favour in exchange for luxury fishing vacations, classic cars and home renovations.

The allegations of fraud, embezzlement and kickbacks — which have not been proven in court — are contained in a statement of claim filed as part of a civil suit at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

The two former employees named in the civil suit are Frank Medwenitsch, who was the hospital's director of planning and capital projects, and Brock Marshall, who was the director of engineering and operations.

Medwenitsch resigned in October. Marshall took an early retirement package last February and stopped working in April, according to the hospital's statement of claim, although he continued to receive a salary until August.

Reached at his home Wednesday morning, Marshall told Metro he has yet to see the lawsuit and was surprised to hear the allegations.

"I know they've been doing a big risk review and I talked to them about everything that went on," he said. "I was very forthright and honest about things that had transpired."

Marshall said he never received any kickbacks.

Medwenitsch could not be reached for comment.

The suit also names five Ontario companies: DRS Construction, Federal Electronic Ltd., G.A.L. Power Systems Ottawa Ltd., Pro Management Construction Inc. and Ottawa Diamond Construction Inc.

Roch St-Louis, whom the lawsuit identifies as the sole registered director of Pro Management and the operator of Ottawa Diamond, said he was a subcontractor and never worked directly for the hospital.

"It's basically a fishing expedition. It's only been allegations for the last six months," he said. "It's all 'he said, we said, they said.'"

None of the other contractors returned calls for comment.

The Ottawa Hospital said in a statement published on its website that it called in police after an internal investigation into its planning and facilities department uncovered "grounds for concern."

Neither the hospital nor the police had much to say Wednesday. It is still unclear if a criminal investigation is underway.

"We can't comment on an investigation on a named person until charges are laid," said Const. Marc Soucy. "We're not talking about it."

Hospital spokeswoman Kate Eggins declined comment.

The civil suit alleges Medwenitsch and Marshall gave the companies an unfair advantage by leaking them advance copies of procurement documents, and giving them details about their competitors' bids and insider information about hospital projects.

The hospital also alleges Medwenitsch and Marshall rigged bids and "knowingly allowed and approved improper invoices" for work that was either not done at all, half done or hadn't been finished.

The lawsuit further alleges they knew about and approved "inflated pricing" by the contractors.

In return, the suit alleges, the two former hospital employees received luxury trips – including a stay in a Montebello, Que., resort as well as a lavish British Columbia fishing excursion that ended with a trip to California's Napa Valley with their spouses – jobs for Medwenitsch's daughters, work on their homes and cottages and free tickets to sporting events.

None of the gifts, trips and other benefits were ever disclosed to the hospital, the suit alleges.

$250K

The amount the hospital is seeking in punitive damages. It has also asked for an unspecified amount of money it claims to have lost to the scheme.

> **"I know they've been doing a big risk review and I talked to them about everything that went on. I was very forthright and honest about things that had transpired.**
> Brock Marshall

The civil suit alleges Medwenitsch made sure the companies were chosen for hefty hospital contracts.

One example cited in the court documents involved a fireproofing project at the hospital's General campus. Four companies bid on the project this past June. DRS Construction put in the second-lowest bid, the lawsuit alleges, but Medwenitsch made sure the company got the $88,000 job.

The hospital alleges that in 2014, Medwenitsch and two contractors "conspired and colluded together to essentially extort Marshall" to get his approval for "numerous unsupported and improper" invoices going back to 2010.

The suit alleges Medwenitsch and one of the contractors pressured Marshall to rush through invoices without proper review. The hospital claims Marshall knew the invoices were falsified but collaborated with Medwenitsch anyway.

The hospital says it discovered the scheme last August and suspended Medwenitsch.

Around the same time, the hospital brought in an outside auditor to investigate its planning department.

Then, in September, the hospital sat down with Medwenitsch and his lawyer.

During that meeting, the lawsuit claims, Medwenitsch denied all of the allegations against him.

But he later admitted his wrongdoing when the hospital confronted him with records of text messages and emails he exchanged with the contractors, the lawsuit alleges. He resigned in October.

The hospital is seeking $250,000 in punitive damages. It has also asked for an unspecified amount of money it claims to have lost to the scheme. The lawsuit says the hospital will have a final tally before the trial begins.

WITH FILES FROM MICHAEL WOODS

INFORMATION

Access denied

The Ottawa Hospital has been trying for months now to keep a lid on explosive allegations about a "kickback" scheme involving two of its former employees and several private contractors.

Those allegations — which have not been proven in court — are contained in a civil lawsuit that the hospital filed this week in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

But back in October, long before any of these allegations were made public, the hospital was trying to keep them under wraps.

The hospital refused to release any information in response to two of Metro's freedom-of-information requests.

One of the requests was for any information about its investigation into financial irregularities in its facilities and planning department. The other was for anything related to a leave of absence taken by Frank Medwenitsch, one of the ex-employees named in the hospital's lawsuit.

But the hospital wouldn't turn over anything, citing sections of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act that exempt material that could end up in court or that touches on dealings between an employer and employee.

So in mid-October, Metro filed two appeals to Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The commissioner's office agreed with the hospital's decision to not release any documents about Medwenitsch's leave of absence. But it is now looking into the other request for any record of the hospital's investigation of its facilities and planning department. That probe uncovered "grounds for concern," according to a statement published on the hospital's website late Tuesday.

The commissioner's office recently told Metro it would first try to settle the complaint through mediation. If that fails, the commissioner could hold an inquiry. STEVE RENNIE/METRO

Key players in the lawsuit

OTTAWA HOSPITAL

Ex-directors, contractors at centre of fraud allegations

Joe Lofaro
Metro | Ottawa

The Ottawa Hospital alleges two of its former employees conspired with some companies and individuals in a massive fraud scheme. Here is a look at who they are and of what they've been accused.

None of the allegations have been proven in court.

WHO: Frank Medwenitsch
JOB: Worked at The Ottawa Hospital from 1989 to 2015. Prior to retiring, he was director of the hospital's planning department.
ALLEGATIONS:
· Medwenitsch rigged the bid on a $88,000 fireproofing project at the hospital's General campus;
· He allowed G.A.L. Power to choose bidders and arrange for the "intentional exclusion" of another competitor on a tender for work on the Civic campus' generator and fuel system;
· He let Gerry Dubé choose bidders to invite for painting work at the General campus.

WHO: Brock Marshall
JOB: Worked at the Ottawa Hospital from 1988 to 2015. Prior to retiring in April 2015, he was director of engineering and operations in the department headed by Medwenitsch.
ALLEGATIONS:
· Marshall "agreed to process improper and overstated DRS invoices" after being extorted by Medwenitsch over payment to the company for work done by Roch St-Louis on Marshall's hobby farm and home;
· He approved a portion of DRS invoices, "while knowing of their illegitimacy."

WHO: Gerry Dubé
JOB: The officer and director of DRS Construction.
ALLEGATIONS:
· Dubé "conspired and colluded" with Medwenitsch and St-Louis to extort Marshall to secure his approval to pay numerous unsupported and improper DRS invoices dating back to 2010.

WHO: Larry St. Pierre
JOB: President and registered director of Federal Electric.
ALLEGATIONS:
· Federal Electric took advantage of inflated purchase orders to cover the cost of employing Medwenitsch's daughter at the company.

WHO: Guy Adrian Lapierre
JOB: Director and officer of G.A.L. Power.
ALLEGATIONS:
· He helped pay for Medwenitsch and other project managers in the planning department to attend a fishing trip and stay at the Fairmont Kenauk Resort in Montebello, Que.

WHO: Roch St-Louis
JOB: Director and officer of Pro Management and operator of Ottawa Diamond Construction.
ALLEGATIONS:
· His company installed windows, reconfigured a deck, moved a gazebo, and installed a river stone at Medwenitsch's cottage and home, "all below costs or at no cost" in return for "improper procurement advantages."

The Ottawa Hospital says it called in police after an audit of its planning and facilities department found "grounds for concern." JOE LOFARO/METRO

Ladies First! takes place at Live on Elgin at 8 p.m. on Saturday. CONTRIBUTED

Riishi Von Rex to play Ottawa

BACKSTAGE PASS

Experimental gypsy rock duo is raw, silky and playful

Trevor Greenway
Metro | Ottawa

Riishi Von Rex was ready to give up on her solo music career — until esteemed jazz drummer Michel Delage answered her Kijiji call.

The two found common cadence instantly shredding on experimental gypsy rock — tunes that slowly evolved into diverse jams infused with everything from jazz to ska to rock — and it's damn good.

The pair has since recorded an EP and is set to head out on a six-week, cross-Canada tour from the East Coast all the way to Alberta. They'll be spinning heads along the way for sure. But before they go, they'll be showing Ottawa how deep their progressive rabbit hole goes at the second annual Rocksteady Bookings' Ladies First! show at Live on Elgin this Saturday.

Although it will be only two people on stage, expect to hear as much racket as a full band. These two know how to fill a room.

"I wouldn't have tried to do this with anyone but Michel (Delage). He can be really atmospheric, he can be really commanding and totally steal the show for me. It's a good balance," says Von Rex.

"You have to find someone that you are legitimately excited about working with and that keeps you pushing it to your absolute maximum, because there is no room for breathing when you are a duo. There is just no space that you don't have to fill."

Developing a great, walloping sound with only two players is a feat on its own and making it tight and solid is even tougher. Delage says the pair uses "chaos and craziness" to fill the space, rather than straight distortion and power. This is most notable on Shed Your Helmet, the title track from the duo's EP.

"It starts out with my crazy drum intro and during the song, Riishi's riff comes back and I just go absolutely crazy," says Delage.

"I don't play anything in time, it's just more about just trying to make the universe implode with my drumming."

This is where the comparisons come in. I see Riishi Von Rex as a bit of an extension of former El Paso-based prog rock band the Mars Volta or Gogol Bordello, but with more of a jazzy, sinister ska feel. It's a bit more playful than a Mars Volta concept album and just as fun as Bordello's Pura Vida Conspiracy.

Von Rex's raw vocals cut through the music like a chainsaw ripping through raw meat. Her silky and sometimes smoky voice gives you the feeling of something menacing to come: a ghostly encounter, a dark trip down a spiraling wave, a murder most foul. Shed Your Helmet is, at times, as heavy as it is silky, as deep as it is light and as refined as it is raw. The album is a perfect blend of crazy and cool, something I want to put on in any mood. The EP is soaringly progressive throughout — taking you on the wild roller-coaster ride that Delage and Von Rex have constructed. It all culminates on Shed Your Helmet — a progressive beast driven by Delage's chaotic drumming and Rex's sinister vocals and distorted guitar. The gypsy influence really comes out to play on this track — the spilling horns, the plunging bass and Von Rex's high-pitched, haunting screech that gives it a fitful flair that's impossible to ignore.

You'll dance to this album, you'll drink to it, you'll party to it and you'll even mourn with it. Delage and Von Rex have found a wormhole here and they want you to go with them on the ride. All aboard!

THE SHOW

Ladies First! takes place at Live on Elgin this Saturday at 8 p.m. and features other artists, including Maya Killtron, Amanda Lowe, Coccinella and Ghostly Hounds. Rocksteady have also teamed up with Harmony House women's shelter to raise funds and awareness around violence against women. A portion of the proceeds will go to the shelter.

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Unions upbeat about fed talks

LABOUR

Discussions to begin in just a few weeks

Michael Woods
Metro | Ottawa

Public service union leaders say they're "cautiously optimistic" as collective bargaining talks with the federal government are set to resume in a few weeks.

Talks had been scheduled for December, but Treasury Board officials asked for a delay as the Liberal government establishes a new mandate.

Some talks are resuming this week. But the major ones begin Feb. 1 with Public Service Alliance of Canada teams representing 98,000 members — including 40,000 in Ottawa-Gatineau — scheduled for four days of negotiations.

"We're certainly not expecting a deal in the first week," said Chris Aylward, PSAC's national executive vice-president. "What we are hoping for is a change of tone."

Talks with the former Conservative government soured last summer when a section of budget Bill C-59 gave the government power to unilaterally impose changes to public servants' sick leave plans.

The new government has pledged to respect the collective bargaining process, but its plans for sick leave are unclear.

"We're not asking for the moon and the stars," Aylward said, "but we are expecting a fair collective agreement and a decent wage increase, as well … What we've seen so far gives us some reason to be cautiously optimistic."

Aylward said the government doesn't need to immediately repeal the section of Bill C-59 that allows it to bypass the collective bargaining process, as long as it promises not to legislate a new plan.

Canadian Association of Professional Employees president Emmanuelle Tremblay said she's hoping for a firm commitment from the government that it won't invoke its powers under Bill C-59.

"How can we go back to the table in good faith if that Damocles sword is hanging over our heads?" she asked.

Tremblay said CAPE's talks with Treasury Board won't begin until late February or early March. CAPE represents about 12,500 public servants.

The city wants an "advocate architect" to help develop a new central library that will replace this building. METRO FILE PHOTO

ARCHITECTURE

City seeks 3D design of flagship library

Lucy Scholey
Metro | Ottawa

Ottawa's new central library will start to take shape by the end of this year, but the building costs and location are still unknown.

The city has posted a request for proposals seeking an "advocate architect" — a third-party architect to create a 3D design of what the building's structure could look like. Details will include the number of stories, room usage and total land space.

"It's like your recipe for the building," said Ottawa Public Library CEO Danielle McDonald.

While staff will have an idea of where the walls will go, they won't yet know the paint colours. That's for the final architect to decide. He or she will be hired through a separate procurement process.

The public likely won't see the design until a full mockup is completed.

The big questions — costs and location — are yet to be determined. Staff will come before the library board by the end of March with those details. The latest cost estimate is $86 million. This year, the city has budgeted $3.9 million for planning costs.

Meanwhile, the city has posted the results of a Nanos survey about Ottawa's library. The 1,682 people surveyed want it to be conveniently located, near a transit station, with ample lighting.

McDonald said that comes as no surprise, but the survey will reinforce what people want from the library.

If there are no delays, shovels for the new library will hit ground in 2018 and the doors will open two years later.

IN BRIEF

Driver dies as car falls off Highway 417 overpass

A man died Wednesday morning after a car fell off a Highway 416 overpass and crashed on its roof onto the 417 eastbound lane.

Ottawa paramedics said the Renfrew Paramedic Service notified them of the accident at around 8:15 a.m. They said the man, who was declared dead on scene, appeared to be in his mid-40s.

The car was a black four-door sedan. There were no other injuries reported. The Ontario Provincial Police are investigating.

LUCY SCHOLEY/METRO

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A Tribe bonding abroad

MUSIC

DJ collective connects with indigenous people on tour

Lucy Scholey
Metro | Ottawa

Fresh off their Australian tour, A Tribe Called Red will be launching a month-long indigenous series at the National Arts Centre on Saturday, Jan. 9. FALLING TREE PHOTOGRAPHY

Members of A Tribe Called Red spent a night in an Australian indigenous tent embassy in Canberra late last year, meeting elders and tasting kangaroo.

The Juno Award-winning Ottawa-based DJ collective — known for showcasing its mix of powwow vocals, electronic beats and drumming at the sweaty Electric Pow Wow dance parties at Babylon — ended 2015 with its first-ever tour Down Under.

"It's awesome going to Europe and getting to share our message and what we do over there," said collective member Bear Witness, "but when we get to go to someplace like Mexico or Australia … where other indigenous people have had these similar experiences of living in a colonized country, there's something more exciting about that, about going there and sharing those experiences with those people."

The tent embassy — a gathering place and symbol of Australia's Aboriginal land rights struggles — is one example.

The trio, Bear Witness, DJ NDN and 2oolman, is known for playing visuals that pack a strong message — political or funny clips that reference native people. And the group heard praise in Australia for inspiring indigenous youth.

But Bear Witness said the group does not create music with a message in mind.

> **When we make our music, we're thinking, 'Are people going to be able to dance to this?'**
>
> A Tribe Called Red member Bear Witness

"When we make our music, we're thinking, 'Are people going to be able to dance to this?' That's where our inspiration comes from. That's where our heads are at."

But fans can expect a more message-laden new album, which may drop this spring, and more collaborative songs (akin to the remix of Buffy Sainte-Marie's Working for the Government).

Now that A Tribe Called Red is back on Canadian soil, the trio is launching the National Art Centre's month-long series of indigenous music, storytelling and dancing during NAC Presents on Saturday, Jan. 9.

NAC PRESENTS

What: Canadian musicians the likes of Hey Rosetta!, Corb Lund and Oliver Jones have been gracing the NAC for its special NAC Presents series for five years.

The national capital institution is celebrating that musical milestone this weekend with five acts: A Tribe Called Red, Toronto-based multidisciplinary artist U.S. Girls, funk-pop-punk musician Mehdi Cayenne, four-piece rock-and-roll band the Lionyls, and Live 88.5's DJ Noah.

Date: Saturday, Jan. 9 at the NAC's main lobby

Tickets: Start at $15

What if I can't make it?: There will be many other NAC Presents shows this season. That includes:

- Petr Cancura with guest Lynn Miles on Feb. 4
- Corb Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans on Feb. 19
- David Francey on March 4
- Alex Cuba on March 5
- The Weather Station on March 31
- Oh Susanna on April 8
- Michael Kaeshammer on April 23

For more, visit nac-cna.ca.

LUCY SCHOLEY/METRO

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WILDLIFE **Newly named male polar bear cubs** York and Eli, shown at Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park Zoo, are named for York Factory First Nation, which has traditional lands that include important polar bear denning habitats. Eli is named for a York Factory elder. HANDOUT/ASSINIBOINE ZOO/THE CANADIAN PRESS

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Families meet to talk about coming inquiry

The families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls have been gathering for years — to share their stories, support each other and call for action — but this time was different.

Now that the federal government has committed to holding a national inquiry into the more than 1,200 First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and girls who have been murdered or gone missing in Canada, families came together in Thunder Bay Wednesday to share their hopes and fears of what it should set out to achieve.

"A lot of people were feeling that they were finally going to have an opportunity to have some closure," said deputy grand chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which represents 49 First Nations in northern Ontario.

"Maybe the justice may not take place, but I think even being provided an opportunity to be heard on their concerns and having an opportunity to change the present process," said Achneepineskum, who was at the pre-inquiry consultation meeting Wednesday afternoon.

> **They will leave this meeting and go home with the memories of their loved ones.**
> Chief Connie Gray MacKay

So were Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett and Status of Women Minister Patricia Hajdu, who along with Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould are hearing from families, national aboriginal organizations, frontline service providers and other stakeholders as part of their pre-inquiry consultation process.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Feds in fight over IT rules

CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Decision took away ability of courts to select own purchases

Newly released documents show the country's highest court is ready to launch a legal battle with the federal government over new IT rules which the Supreme Court of Canada fears would threaten its independence.

The Supreme Court is not alone in these concerns: the Federal Court, Federal Court of Appeal, Court Martial Appeal Court and Tax Court are all prepared to launch a constitutional challenge against having the government's super-IT department involved in their digital affairs.

The federal Liberals are now left to decide how to handle an issue created by a decision of the previous Conservative government that came into effect during the federal election.

That decision forced the courts to go through Shared Services Canada for all IT purchases, such as servers, routers and software, rather than letting them make the procurements on their own. The courts had that power until Sept. 1, when the new rules kicked in and made them a "mandatory client" of Shared Services Canada, which oversees purchases and digital services for 43 of the heaviest IT users in the federal government.

The move approved by the Conservative cabinet in May 2015 was supposed to save money, since Shared Services Canada buys in bulk for the federal government, and improve digital security, because Shared Services Canada buys from safe suppliers.

Briefing material provided to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shortly after he took office shows the courts were worried that having a government department involved in their IT services "and the perceived implications for control of their data" infringed on judicial independence.

"They must maintain control of their data, not only because of concerns about confidentiality, but also because an independent judiciary cannot tolerate having its sensitive information controlled by a separate branch of government," reads part of Trudeau's briefing on urgent issues.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

Master of Memory

A Nova Scotia student has made history as Canada's first International Master of Memory during the 24th annual World Memory Championship a few weeks ago in December.

Evan Xie
CONTRIBUTED

"It's a phenomenal accomplishment," said Chris Strickey, director of admissions at King's-Edgehill School in Windsor where Grade 10 student Evan Xie attends.

Strickey said Xie has become one of only 160 people in the world to receive the distinction. To receive the award, a person must complete three feats at the competition: memorize a minimum of 1,000 digits in random sequence in one hour, memorize a minimum of 12 decks of randomly shuffled cards in one hour, and memorize one card deck in less than two minutes. HALEY RYAN/METRO

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H-bomb threat provokes world

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

North Korea condemned globally for its actions

Soon after the ground shook around its nuclear testing facility, North Korea trumpeted its first hydrogen bomb test — a self-proclaimed "H-bomb of justice" that would mark a major and unanticipated advance for its still-limited nuclear arsenal.

The announcement Wednesday by the defiant, impoverished country was met with widespread skepticism, as well as a strong condemnation by the UN Security Council, which said it would begin work on a resolution for new international sanctions.

North Korea's fourth nuclear test likely pushed its scientists and engineers closer to their goal of building a warhead small enough to place on a missile that can reach the U.S. mainland. But South Korea's spy agency thought the estimated explosive yield from the blast was much smaller than what even a failed hydrogen bomb detonation would produce, and the White House said its early analysis of underground activity "is not consistent" with the North's claim of a successful H-bomb test.

There was high-level concern in Seoul and elsewhere. South Korean President Park Geunhye ordered her military to bolster its combined defence posture with U.S. forces. She called the test a "grave provocation" and "an act that threatens our lives and future." Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, "We absolutely cannot allow this."

U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter spoke by phone with his South Korean counterpart Han Min-Koo, and they agreed that a North Korean nuclear test would be an "unacceptable and irresponsible provocation," according to Carter's spokesman, Peter Cook.

> **We absolutely cannot allow this.**
> Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

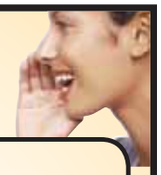
North Korea goes to great lengths to conceal its tests by conducting them underground and tightly sealing off tunnels or other vents through which radioactive residue could escape.

A successful H-bomb test would be a big advance in North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Fusion is the main principle behind the hydrogen bomb, which can be hundreds of times more powerful than atomic bombs that use fission..

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FRENCH, ENGLISH as a SECOND LANGUAGE



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January 11 to February 5, 2016
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ép ÉDUCATION PERMANENTE

ROYAL FAMILY

Young prince has class

The heir to the heir to the heir to the British throne has started nursery school.

Prince William and his wife Kate marked the occasion by releasing two photographs of two-and-a-half-year-old George outside the school building.

The royal couple had earlier announced he would be attending Westacre Montessori School in Norfolk, 180 kilometres north of London.

The school has said he will receive the same treatment as other pupils.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Prince William and wife Kate released these images of son George on his first day at school. CONTRIBUTED/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

UNITED STATES

Gun measures fall short

The gun control measures a tearful President Barack Obama announced Tuesday would not have prevented the slaughters of 20 first-graders at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, or 14 county workers at a holiday party in San Bernardino, Calif.

Obama's executive action expands mandatory background checks to gun shows, flea markets and online sales, adds more than 230 examiners and staff to help process them and calls on states to submit accurate and updated criminal history data.

Those measures are seen as crucial to stemming gun suicides — the cause of two-thirds of gun deaths — by blocking immediate access to weapons. But an Associated Press review shows they would have had no impact in keeping weapons from suspects in several of the deadliest recent mass shootings. The shooters at Sandy Hook and San Bernardino used weapons bought by others, shielding them from background checks. In other cases, the shooters legally bought guns.

In Aurora, Colo., and at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., men undergoing mental health treatment were cleared to buy weapons because federal background checks looked to criminal histories and court-ordered commitments for signs of mental illness. The suspect in a shooting at a church in Charleston, S.C., should have been flagged at the time, but errors and delays cleared the way for his purchase.

Obama rejected the idea that undermines the changes are not worth pursuing.

"We maybe can't save everybody, but we could save some," Obama said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Iraq offers to mediate
Iraq has offered to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran after tensions soared following the kingdom's execution of a Shiite cleric. Iraq's Shiite-led government relies on Iranian help to battle the Islamic State group, but is also trying to repair ties to oil-rich Saudi Arabia.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Violence shortens life expectancy in Mexico
A new study suggests that at its peak, Mexico's drug violence was so bad it caused male life expectancy to drop by months. Experts say from 2005-2010, homicide rates increased from 9.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2005 to more than 22 in 2010. It's now 16 per 100,000 in 2014. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Twitter is not tied to 140-character limit

SOCIAL MEDIA

CEO tweets screenshot of 1,325-character message

Twitter appears ready to loosen its decade-old restriction on the length of messages in a bid to make its service more appealing to a wider audience accustomed to the greater freedom offered by Facebook and other forums.

CEO and co-founder Jack Dorsey telegraphed Twitter's intentions in a tweet posted Tuesday after the technology news site Re/Code reported the company is exploring increasing its limits on text from 140 characters to as many as 10,000.

Dorsey didn't directly address the Re/Code report that cited unnamed people, but he made it clear that Twitter isn't wedded to the 140-character limit. He illustrated his point by posting a screenshot of a text consisting of 1,325 characters.

If Twitter were to allow tweets to span 10,000 characters, it could produce 1,700-word dissertations, based on the size of Dorsey's extended post. In his message, Dorsey wrote that Twitter has already noticed that many of its roughly 300 million users already have been including screenshots of lengthy texts in their tweets. He indicated Twitter is examining ways to give people more room to express themselves without polluting the service with gasbags.

Twitter co-founder and CEO Jack Dorsey telegraphed that change is coming in a tweet on Tuesday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Imposing some restraint "inspires creativity and brevity. And a sense of speed. We will never lose that feeling," Dorsey pledged.

At the same time, Dorsey said Twitter isn't "going to be shy about building more utility and power into Twitter for people. As long as it's consistent with what people want to do, we're going to explore it."

Analysts said Dorsey is probably trying to avoid a backlash among long-time Twitter users who consider the 140-character tweeting limit sacred. At the same time, he needs to respond to company shareholders pining for a bigger audience that would generate more advertising revenue.

More revenue eventually could help Twitter turn a profit for the first time in its history.

Twitter can't afford "to become stagnant, they need to get bigger if they want to build a more relevant advertising platform," said Topeka Capital Markets analyst Blake Harper.

After a long streak of robust growth that turned it into one of the Internet's hottest companies, Twitter's growth has slowed dramatically during the past year-and-half to leave it scrambling to catch up with social networking leader Facebook and its 1.5 billion users.

The pressure has been building on Dorsey to take drastic measures to accelerate user growth as Twitter's stock has sunk further below its November 2013 initial public offering price of $26 US. The shares shed 64 cents Tuesday to close at $21.92, a decline of nearly 40 per cent from where they stood from when Dorsey became CEO last summer.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

> **As long as it's consistent with what people want to do, we're going to explore it.** Jack Dorsey

IN BRIEF

Star Wars unseats Avatar
In just 20 days in theatres, Star Wars: The Force Awakens has unseated Avatar as the No. 1 North American movie of all time. As of Tuesday, the film was just shy of the record at $758.2 million. THE CANADIAN PRESS

TransCanada to file claim
TransCanada Corp. says it intends to file a claim under Chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement in response to the U.S. government's rejection of its Keystone XL pipeline.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

market minute

DOLLAR 71.02¢ (–0.46¢)
TSX 12,726.80 (–193.34)
OIL $33.97 US (–$2.00)
GOLD $1,091.90 US (+$13.50)

NATURAL GAS: $2.267 US (–5.8¢)
DOW JONES: 16,906.51 (–252.15)

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings delivers a keynote address at CES 2016 at The Venetian Las Vegas on Wednesday in Las Vegas. ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

STREAMING VIDEO

Netflix in 130 more countries

Netflix has already crossed off the biggest item on its New Year's list of resolutions. The Internet video service debuted in 130 countries Wednesday in a surprise move likely to reel in millions of new subscribers.

CEO Reed Hastings revealed the scope of Netflix's expansion at the end of a presentation in Las Vegas at CES, one of the technology industry's marquee events.

"You are witnessing the birth of a global TV network," Hastings crowed on stage.

The news caught almost everyone off guard because Netflix had previously set a goal of being available in most of the world by the end of this year. It looked like the Los Gatos, California, company had plenty of work ahead it because it ended December in 60 countries.

Now, Netflix is available in 21 different languages and streaming in just about every market that it had in its sights, with the notable exception of China, the world's most populous country. Entering China may be a formidable challenge requiring potentially prickly negotiations with a government that blocks its citizenry from seeing material it considers objectionable or incendiary.

Netflix currently has no plans to push into North Korea, Syria or Crimea because of restrictions on U.S. companies operating in those countries.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Thursday, January 7, 2016

the big question

Will Obama's tears endear Americans to gun control?

Well, he's unlikely to sway the NRA, but as far as emotional impact goes, breaking down on live TV isn't a bad strategy for the president. Scientists have many theories about why adults cry, given that, unlike children, they can use words to express what's wrong. Some speculate that crying evolved as an "attachment behaviour": It's a way to ask others for help when words fail us. And in fact, some studies suggest that photos of teary faces and sad stories with characters who cry both cause research participants to feel sympathetic sadness and a desire to support and comfort the crying person. If Barack Obama — who choked up Tuesday while enumerating the seemingly endless mass shootings that have rocked the U.S. during his presidency — elicited such empathy in his audience, logically they'd want to support his plan to ensure more gun dealers are licensed and conduct background checks. That's guaranteed to make the gun nuts want to weep.

Politician + alcoholism does not equal Rob Ford

Michael Coren
For Metro

To state the bitterly self-evident, politics is a dirty business. But there is also a cloak of decorum that sometimes covers the body politic, with journalists respecting the personal struggles and private pain of many of those who govern us.

There are times when the private and the public mingle to such an extent that we have a right to know.

I have often been impressed at how what is genuinely important on an individual but not political level has remained confidential.

But there are times, of course, when the private and the public mingle to such an extent that we have a right to know. Newly minted Liberal MP and former broadcaster Seamus O'Regan obviously believed this when he recently announced that he is seeking help in a treatment centre to "live an alcohol-free life." In other words, he struggles with alcohol, and as he begins his new work as a representative of the people, realizes that now is the time to change.

I have good friends who have acted similarly. The treatment can be relatively brief, but it's thorough and tough and the struggle never ends. Yet the hardest part is over: the admission that there is a problem. It's humbling, frightening and, of course, opens one up to attack. As it most certainly did in this case.

Within hours of the O'Regan's statement, various conservative activists and even columnists and broadcasters were on the offensive, claiming that the man was "a drunk" and digging up criticisms he had made of former Toronto mayor Rob Ford. There's no difference between the two, they argued, but because one is a Liberal and close to Justin Trudeau he's getting an easy ride.

The juxtaposition is fatuous, offensive and downright cruel. I know O'Regan a little and have always found him to be a gentleman, but the greater point is that unlike Rob Ford, he was completely honest about his problem, there is no police investigation and he doesn't associate with shady characters. There are no manic, racist rants and no embarrassing those people he represents.

Ford used prohibited drugs and repeatedly lied about it. O'Regan drank too much of what is sold on every major street in Canada and told us so. His husband tweeted how proud he was of his decision; Rob Ford is on film offering his wife to another man for sex.

What is remarkable is not how similar, but how different are these two cases. As for those who attacked a man at his most vulnerable, shame on you.

Michael Coren is a writer, broadcaster and author of the forthcoming Epiphany: A Christian's Change of Heart & Mind over Same-Sex Marriage. Find him on Twitter @michaelcoren.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

metroview

Charlie Hebdo is just not interesting enough to offend me

Despite being Catholic, I'm not offended by the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo's new cover depicting God as a Kalashnikov-wielding terrorist.

I suppose I could be — the Vatican newspaper is — but that would mean taking the editorial position of the notoriously inflammatory publication seriously. And I don't.

To be clear: The attack one year ago today at Charlie Hebdo's Paris offices was unconscionable, as was the subsequent attack on a Jewish supermarket in the city, which together killed 17 people.

But demeaning faith in the most violent pen strokes is the magazine's raison d'être, and so I'm not surprised or offended by Charlie Hebdo marking the anniversary with everything it's got.

According to the Associated Press, the magazine features editorials attacking "university students who wear veils or openly pray in classrooms, hospital patients who refuse medical treatment from someone of the opposite sex and France's intelligence community. Mixed in were blasphemous caricatures targeting a range of beliefs, obscene sketches" and colourful profanity.

One editor wrote the magazine is commemorating colleagues who died "for daring to laugh at religion."

Richard Rohr, a prominent U.S. Catholic priest, has said he loves when atheists laugh at religions for stories like the Garden of Eden, because "No one believes that." Those stories are metaphors, he says, intended to describe a God who is otherwise indescribable.

Charlie Hebdo's atheism is as simplistic as laughing at a virgin birth. The magazine is practically fundamental in its anti-religious stance. Meanwhile, globally, eight in 10 people identify with a religion.

The magazine doesn't even speak to the more secular western experience of faith. In Canada, for example, fully 73 per cent of people believe in God, though only 30 per cent subscribe to a religion.

Not only does a cover like yesterday's not surprise me, then, it doesn't even stimulate me intellectually. The magazine can heap scorn better than most, but it has a juvenile understanding of that which it hates, and constructs no reasonable alternative.

The magazine makes the mistake of thinking insulting people is, de facto, a worthy goal. And in its commitment to offend and anger strangers, it has something in common with terrorist propaganda videos (on a far lesser scale).

On the other hand, the magazine does support the free movement of ideas by exploring the outermost reaches of free speech.

I'll give it that, and then get on with my faith.

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metro LIFE

Your essential daily news

HBO will pull the plug on its hit comedy Girls after the show's sixth season next year

A Making a Murderer primer

STREAMING

A guide to the documentary everyone's talking about

The 10-part Netflix documentary series Making a Murderer, which casts doubt on the legal process in the case of convicted killers Steven Avery and his then-teenage nephew Brendan Dassey, has prompted celebrities to armchair sleuths to flood online message boards and Twitter feeds.

Authorities involved with the Wisconsin case say the series is slanted and omits crucial facts that led to Avery and Dassey being found guilty in the death of photographer Teresa Halbach.

The filmmakers, meanwhile, are standing by their work that spans nearly a decade and largely concentrates on the defence and perspective of Avery and Dassey's relatives.

The rush of attention has left many wondering: How did we get here? And what's next?

The back story

Avery made national headlines in 2003 when he was released after spending nearly two decades behind bars after being wrongfully convicted of rape. Two years later, Avery and Dassey were charged with killing Halbach, who visited the Avery family salvage yard to take photos of a minivan on Halloween. Her bones and belongings were found burned near Avery's trailer. Both were convicted and sentenced to life terms, but only Dassey is eligible for parole — in 2048.

The series' take

The documentary strongly suggests the possibility that Manitowoc County sheriff's deputies planted evidence against Avery, including a key found in his bedroom and blood found in the victim's vehicle. But Sheriff Robert Hermann denied that Tuesday. He said he watched the series: "I call it a film. It's missing a lot of important pieces of evidence."

Authorities say doc is biased

The series spends much of its time detailing the perspective of Avery and Dassey family members. The case's special prosecutor, Ken Kratz has told other media outlets that the documentary ignores the majority of the physical evidence. The omissions include the fact that Avery's DNA was found on the hood latch on Halbach's SUV, which was hidden on the salvage lot. Kratz has also said a bullet fired from Avery's gun was found in his garage with Halbach's DNA on it.

The filmmakers disagree

Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos have stood by their work. They said in an email to the AP that critics who might say they intentionally omitted or underplayed key evidence to make the series more entertaining or tragic are wrong. "Those accusations are untrue and unfounded," the statement said.

Online petition

It seems unlikely an online petition seeking a pardon will work. The request posted on Change.org started by petitioning President Barack Obama, who has no such authority in this type of case, since it's not a federal matter. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker spokesperson Laurel Patrick said Tuesday in an email to the AP that the governor hasn't watched the series and that "early in his administration, Gov. Walker made the decision not to issue pardons. Those who feel they have been wrongly convicted can seek to have their convictions overturned by a higher court."

Viewer reaction

Celebrities have tweeted about how into the series they are, late night talk show host Seth Meyers spoofed it and fake Twitter accounts have been set up for some of the main players in the case. However, Sheriff Hermann said some of his officers have received threats in emails and voicemails. He said one was from a convicted felon who said an officer should "take his own life, or else he'd come up there and take it for him." Hermann said Tuesday that threat was passed along to Florida authorities to investigate.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Brendan Dassey is escorted into court in 2007 for sentencing. Dassey's case is at the centre of the Netflix documentary series Making a Murderer. HERALD TIMES/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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CONSEIL DES ÉCOLES CATHOLIQUES DU CENTRE-EST

Inside Spotify's musical genre splicing

SONIC ALGORITHMS

Breaking down music by its digital signatures

Would you classify Justin Bieber as pop or "pop Christmas"? And is Arcade Fire a rock band or "permanent wave"? How about describing Ed Sheeran as "neo mellow," Alabama Shakes as "stomp and holler" or the versatile Grimes as "grave wave," "metropopolis," "nu gaze," or all of the above?

Spotify's "data alchemist" Glenn McDonald can proudly claim authorship of some of those eccentric descriptors. His company has used a complex algorithm to analyze and categorize upwards of 60 million songs on a molecular level — and the micro-classifications now number 1,387 sub-genres in total.

Ultimately, these machinations are allowing a new level of specificity to answer that impossible old first-date query: What kind of music are you into?

"The most interesting thing is how much music there is in the world," McDonald said. "The number of places where I expected to find five or 10 bands and found 200 is just amazing."

Using a tool called machine listening, songs are analyzed by Spotify's music-intelligence division the Echo Nest based on their digital signatures for a number of factors, including tempo, acoustic-ness, energy, danceability, strength of the beat and emotional tone.

Taken together, those numbers can identify the distinguishing aural characteristics of different genres and regional sounds. McDonald has provided a visual representation of the subtle sonic differences at everynoise.com, which maps music along a spectrum where mechanical sounds reside at the top, organic at the bottom, atmospheric on the left and bouncy on the right.

The still-evolving tool can highlight the subtle differences in the hip-hop of Quebec and Finland, for instance, or create cross-genre comparisons between such unlikely bedfellows as Thai indie and Spanish new wave. Any curiosity about what a genre called "necrogrind," "fallen angel" or "electrofox" could possibly sound like can be satisfied with a click.

The process is still imperfect. At one point, the computers confused the sound of the banjo with human singers, simply because not enough banjo samples had been entered. In another instance, Indonesian dangdut was classified as near-identical to American country because, McDonald said, the computers had no protocol to account for twang.

"(People) imagine metal humanoid robots sitting in chairs with silver headphones on nodding mechanically to songs and making up their robot minds," said McDonald. "But the process is totally different. There's no emotion involved. The machines are not pretending to be people.

"They're just trying to find mathematical ways of approximating the effect that humans get from music so the scores can be intelligible and reliable."

Once the machines have identified sonic similarities, a human touch is required to research the sub-genres or create new ones, a task that often falls to McDonald himself. It can be vexing as sub-genres are divvied into progressively tinier fractions; indie pop, for instance, has been subdivided into shiver pop, gauze pop, etherpop, indie fuzz pop, popgaze, and so on.

In analyzing so much musical minutiae, McDonald has noticed that for all this century's rampant boundary-blurring, distinctive differences still exist between types of music.

"I don't think genres have gone away … any more than cuisines have disappeared. There are more fusions," he said. "So just like you can find the Korean burrito place, that doesn't mean there aren't also Korean restaurants and Mexican restaurants.

"Maybe the firmness of the boundaries has gone away. It's more possible to exist in the spaces between genres as they blend into each other."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

An algorithm used by Spotify defines the sound of Alabama Shakes frontwoman Brittany Howard, left, experimental musicmaker Grimes and singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran. GETTY IMAGES

JOHANNA SCHNELLER WHAT I'M WATCHING

I'd rather not be kept in the poop

THE SHOW: Three commercials (Lifetime)
THE MOMENT: The Horror

So I'm watching Lifetime, whose slogan is Television for Women, and a commercial for a constipation product comes on: An accessibly pretty brunette frowns, rubs her tummy, and glugs down a grainy beverage. (Have you noticed that Everywomen are always brunettes, while Bombshells are blondes and Natural Women are redheads?) In the morning, stretching in her jammies, Accessible Brunette smiles to show us all is well… back there. Okay, people need such products, fine. Then a second commercial appears: A different Accessible Brunette walks along clutching a brown shoulder bag, which, very distressingly, grows larger and larger until she nearly buckles. After she consumes her grainy beverage, her purse shrinks back to normal size. While I'm reeling from this depiction of someone collapsing under the bulk of her own poo, a third commercial arrives. This time, Accessible Brunette rides down a spiral slide, but gets stuck halfway — until she consumes a beverage, and glides to the, well, bottom. So now I've watched a woman go from having a tummyache to toting around her waste to actually becoming the waste itself, and I'm thinking, what do Lifetime viewers eat, or perhaps more importantly not eat, that they suffer such indignities? Don't they deserve one commercial where men are buying these products? Why aren't the guys who watch The History Channel or Outdoor Life Network inundated with images of Rakish Fellows toting their poop around? Why is it all beer and car ads for men, and caa-caa for women?

So now I've watched a woman go from having a tummyache to toting around her waste to actually becoming the waste itself

Johanna Schneller is a media connoisseur who zeroes in on pop-culture moments. She appears Monday through Thursday.

metro HOME
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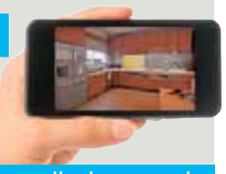


Whirlpool unveils new connected kitchen that can be controlled remotely

MEET THE CONDO

Modern homes along canal

Project overview

Now in its drywall stage, eQ Homes is finishing the last of 10 townhomes in a project on the bank of the Rideau Canal. These stylish, modern homes designed by Barry Hobin are within easy access to the downtown core. The other nine townhomes have already been completed and snapped up.

Location and transit

The Canal East site is located in arguably the prettiest part of Ottawa, close to central bus routes, and within a 10 minute walk or quick bike ride from the University of Ottawa. It also offers a quick route to the 417, making it easy to get around the city.

In the neighbourhood

Homeowners can enjoy a prime location close to the hub of downtown Ottawa, not to mention the Rideau Canal. Not far from the ByWard Market, the homes are surrounded by a network of biking and walking paths and are close to a range of restaurants, public libraries and museums.

Amenities

The townhomes are designed with floor-to-ceiling windows to let in plenty of natural light. The model features an open-concept kitchen, two private balconies, a rooftop terrace and a single-car garage. The sites come with an attached association fee for professionally done landscaping.

ILANA REIMER/FOR METRO

MODERN TOWNHOMES BY RIDEAU CANAL

CONTRIBUTED

NEED TO KNOW

What: Modern Townhomes by Rideau Canal
Builder: eQ Homes
Architect: Barry Hobin
Location: Greenfield Avenue, Montcalm and Concord Streets
Building: Semi-detached homes
Sizes: 1,882 sq. ft
Pricing: $825,000
Model: Three bedrooms, 2.5 bathrooms, three floors, with two private balconies and a rooftop terrace
Status: Complete
Occupancy: Anytime
Realtor: Michelle Kupe
Phone: 613-513-5775
Website: bsidecondos.com
Email: eqhomes.ca

4 BEAUTIFUL BLASTS FROM THE DESIGN WORLD PAST

They say that everything that goes around, comes around. Home decor trends for 2016 are certainly proving that true. Look for inspiration from the 1970s and '80s when accessing the trends for this year— a flashback in time becomes the future for our homes.

Karl Lohnes
For Metro Canada

1 Darth Vader Toaster
The scariest reminder of the late '70s is now available to imprint your toast each morning. $75, UrbanOutfitters.com.

2 Desigual Denim Folk Duvet Cover
Add some jean patches and flower-power for some Partridge family love in the bedroom. $179, Simons.ca

3 Retro Vase
They'll think you dug this one up from your grannies basement. $65, CB2.com

4 Dial Dining Table
'70s gold and walnut offer up stylish dining from the past. $900, CB2.com

metro SPORTS

Lakers GM Mitch Kupchak told ESPN that Kobe Bryant's retirement tour comes ahead of the development of L.A.'s young players

Mika Zibanejad will be in the lineup against the Panthers on Thursday night after taking a scary-looking high stick to the eye on Monday against the Blues. JOEL AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES

Senators get some much-needed health

NHL

Zibanejad, Michalek ready to welcome red-hot Panthers

Ottawa Senators forward Mika Zibanejad is sporting an ugly black eye these days, but he's not too worried about his physical appearance.

Zibanejad will be ready to play when the Senators take on the Florida Panthers on Thursday night. After taking a stick to the eye early in Monday's 3-2 overtime win over St. Louis, the 22-year-old forward said he felt extremely fortunate to have not suffered any serious damage.

"It was quite scary at the beginning when you don't know what's going on and there was blood everywhere," Zibanejad said at Wednesday's practice. "Like I said I was lucky and I'm happy everything is fine."

The Senators could also be getting some much-needed reinforcements for Thursday's game at Canadian Tire Centre. Milan Michalek is set to return after missing the last 16 games with a broken right index finger, while Cody Ceci could also return to the lineup. Ceci has missed the last six games with an upper body injury and a decision on his status will follow Thursday's morning skate.

The Panthers come in riding a ten-game winning streak and are the hottest team in the NHL. Michalek's return will give the Senators some veteran leadership and depth up front.

Thursday's game marks the halfway point of the season for the Senators (19-15-6) who are just outside the playoff picture.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

HOT AT HOME

The Senators have played well at home of late, going 7-2-1 in their last 10 games at Canadian Tire Centre.

BASEBALL

Griffey Jr., Piazza into Hall of Fame

Ken Griffey Jr. has been elected to the baseball Hall of Fame with the highest voting percentage ever and legendary catcher Mike Piazza is joining him.

Jeff Bagwell and former Montreal Expos star Tim Raines fell short in results announced Wednesday.

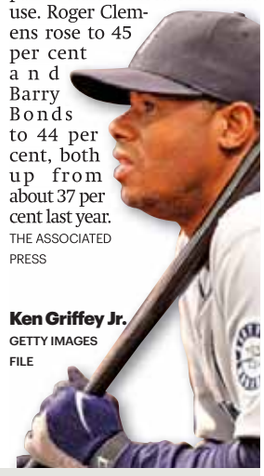
A star slugger of the Steroids Era who was never tainted by accusations of drug use, Griffey was on 437 of 440 votes in his first appearance on the Baseball Writers' Association of America ballot. His 99.3 percentage topped Tom Seaver's 98.84 in 1992.

Piazza, on the ballot for the fourth time, received 365 votes.

A player needs 75 per cent to gain election. Bagwell missed by 15 votes and Raines by 23 in totals announced Wednesday.

After about 100 writers who no longer are active lost their votes under new rules, there were significant increases for a pair of stars accused of steroids use. Roger Clemens rose to 45 per cent and Barry Bonds to 44 per cent, both up from about 37 per cent last year.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Ken Griffey Jr. GETTY IMAGES FILE

IN BRIEF

Predators send Jones to Ohio for centre Johansen

The Nashville Predators traded defenceman Seth Jones to the Columbus Blue Jackets for centre Ryan Johansen on Wednesday, giving up a young piece of their defence in search of offence.

Johansen, 23, and the fourth overall pick in the 2010 draft, has six goals and 20 assists in 38 games this season.

The blue-liner Jones, 21, who went fourth overall in 2013, has played 40 games for Nashville this season with one goal and 10 assists.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kings give Lecavalier one more kick at the Cup

Vincent Lecavalier is ready for one last run at the Stanley Cup, and the Los Angeles Kings are giving him a chance.

The Kings acquired Lecavalier and defenceman Luke Schenn from the Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday in a trade for centre Jordan Weal and a third-round pick.

After playing sparingly for the Flyers over the past two seasons, the 35-year-old Lecavalier plans to end his 17-year NHL career this summer.

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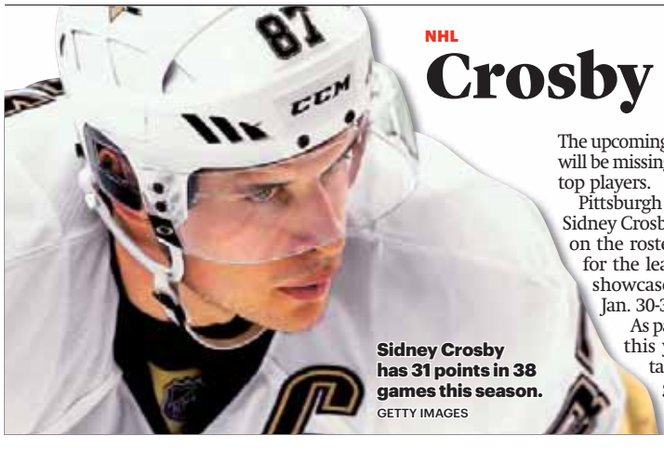

Sidney Crosby has 31 points in 38 games this season. GETTY IMAGES

NHL

Crosby left off of all-star team rosters

The upcoming NHL all-star game will be missing one of the sport's top players.

Pittsburgh Penguins forward Sidney Crosby wasn't included on the roster list Wednesday for the league's mid-season showcase in Nashville on Jan. 30-31.

As part of a new format this year, players will take part in a three-game tournament, played in a 3-on-3 format, and featuring teams representing each NHL division.

Veteran centre Evgeni Malkin and defenceman Kris Letang will represent the Penguins on the Metropolitan Division team. Roster limitations — six forwards, three defencemen and two goalies for each division — led to Crosby's exclusion.

Crosby, a 28-year-old native of Cole Harbour, has appeared in only one all-star game (2007), missing three due to Olympic commitments and five because of injuries. His numbers this season are decent but not at their usual level.

Since his 102-point rookie campaign in 2005-06, Crosby has averaged over a point per game in every season until this one. His play has improved of late but he still entered Wednesday's game in Chicago with 31 points (12 goals, 19 assists) in 38 games.

Forward Leo Komarov of the Toronto Maple Leafs and defencemen Erik Karlsson of the Ottawa Senators and P.K. Subban of the Montreal Canadiens were named to the Atlantic Division team.

THE CANADIAN PRESS, WITH FILES FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPTAINS

Florida's Jaromir Jagr (Atlantic), Chicago's Patrick Kane (Central), Washington's Alex Ovechkin (Metropolitan) and Arizona's John Scott (Pacific) are the captains.

RECIPE Pumpkin Gnocchi

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

So good it's worth the effort.

Ready in
Prep time: 60 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 1/2 cups pumpkin puree
- 3/4 cup fresh ricotta
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, finely grated
- 1 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp nutmeg
- 1 1/3 cups flour
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/4 lb cremini mushrooms, cleaned, trimmed and sliced
- 3 Tbsp fresh sage, chopped

Directions
1. In a large bowl, combine potato puree with ricotta until well blended. Add the Parmesan, sugar, salt and nutmeg and blend. Add a 1/2 cup of flour at a time until a soft dough forms.
2. Turn dough out onto a well-floured surface and separate into 3 or 4 pieces. Using your hands, roll dough out into a long, even tube, about 10-inch in diameter. With a sharp paring knife, cut each rope into about 20 pieces. Keep working until you have about a 60 pieces.
3. Bring a big pot of well-salted water to a boil.
4. Melt butter in a large skillet until it starts to brown. Add mushrooms and sage and cook for 3 minutes, and remove from heat.
5. Add gnocchi to the boiling water about a dozen at a time. Cook each batch for about 5 or 6 minutes, until the gnocchi floats to the top. Allow water to return to a boil between batches. Place cooked gnocchi in a large bowl and set aside.
6. Once all of the gnocchi is cooked, put the skillet back on the heat. Add your gnocchi and allow it all to heat up together. Gently stir so the pasta gets covered in the sage butter. Serve with a fresh sage for garnish.

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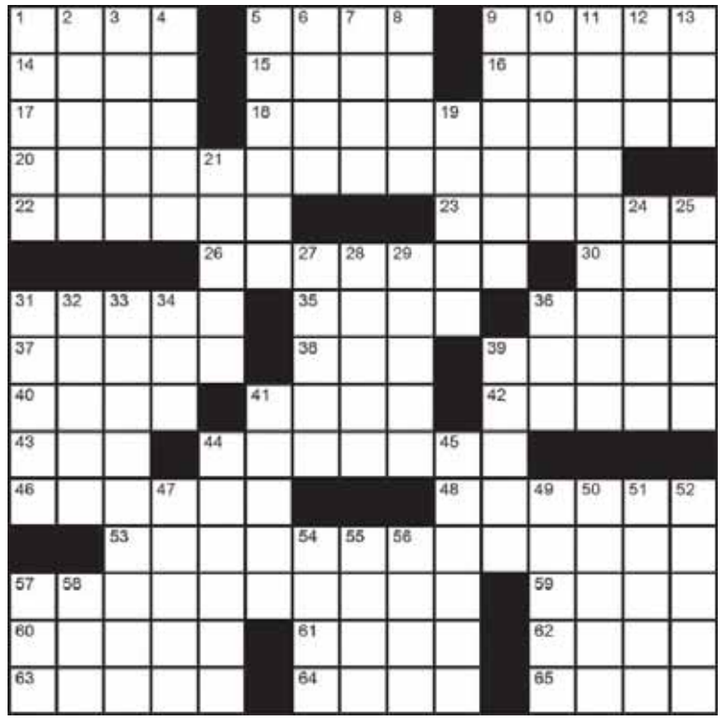
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. 1300 in ancient Rome
5. Mail
9. Record label
14. Director Mr. Petri
15. Entreaty
16. Sir Newton
17. Composer Mr. Schifrin
18. Crown Royal Northern __ __ (Canadian drink which is the 2016 World Whisky of the Year winner as chosen by whisky-expert-from-Britain Jim Murray)
20. Vancouver-born singer/songwriter, lead singer of Chilliwack: 2 wds.
22. Three sharps music key: letter + word
23. Meal
26. Whistlers in kitchens
30. French 'tea'
31. Stockpile
35. Tilled
36. "Buenos __!"
37. Metal mixture
38. Decide
39. Make a funny noise when laughing
40. Scratch
41. Math course, for short
42. Canadian actor Dean McDermott's mother-in-law
43. Olde-style word
44. Bitterness
46. Shoe part
48. Rent your apartment out
53. Tossed workout items: 2 wds.
57. __ Milk (Product by #11-Down)
59. Lioness in "The Lion King" (1994)
60. French composer, Erik __ (b.1866 - d.1925)
61. Crate strip
62. Mideast ruler, variantly
63. Toboggans
64. Choir member
65. Glasgow gal

DOWN
1. Grissol product, __ Toast
2. Insurance filing
3. "You're My World": 1964 hit for __ Black
4. Actor/rapper, LL __ _
5. Globe
6. Exuberance
7. Dweeb
8. Canadian comic actor Mr. Foley
9. Slangy insults
10. Impede, in law
11. As per #57-Across... Food brand with a flowery name and logo
12. Islet
13. Champion
19. Boo-booed
21. Overly sentimental
24. The __ (Tallest building in London in England)
25. Irritable
27. Rose's ouch!-inducer
28. Subject
29. Avril Lavigne's 2002 debut album: 2 wds.
31. Mojave plants
32. "__ __ the Family"
33. Fellow student
34. By what method?
36. Genetic stuff
39. Exfoliating __ (Skincare product)
41. South American animal
44. Changes
45. "Man I __ __ Be" by k-os
47. Lukewarm
49. Vapid
50. Andes animal
51. Island near the Statue of Liberty
52. Sovereign sorts
54. House, in Havana
55. "__ be okay." (There, there)
56. Clean-cut
57. Cousin of -enne
58. Ms. Bertinelli, to pals

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
You will be taken by surprise no matter how prepared you are today. Changes on the work front may be unsettling but if you stay calm and use your head you can easily change them to your advantage.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You have a lot of new responsibilities and are wondering if you are doing too much. Things will get on top of you today to such an extent you'll be forced to cut back on commitments.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
It is too late to back out of something you thought would be easy — you must go through with it. Strive to make a good job of it and, next time, don't volunteer so eagerly.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
The Sun is at odds with Uranus, planet of changes, and it will shock you out of your complacency. You've coasted along long enough — now you must live up to your potential.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Try not to attach too much importance to minor setbacks. Deal with problems as they arise and don't take anything too seriously. Your attitude to what happens is most important.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Something will force you to change your plans but you don't have to abandon them altogether. The route you were planning to take may be blocked but there are other ways to reach your destination. Be flexible.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
You won't get your way today, especially on the home front. You are advised to let partners and loved ones call the shots just this once.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Forces over which you have no control will upset your plans but the long-term forecast is still good. You may even be pleased that you were compelled to change direction. Everything happens for a reason.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Try not to fall out with a friend today because it may be a long time before you get the chance to make up again. What they do may be annoying but you will only make matters worse if you make a big deal of it.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Like it or not you will have to admit that no matter how much you might want to fit into a certain environment it was never meant to be. Today's Sun-Uranus link indicates it is time to bring to an end something.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Be true to your principles and do the right thing. Your reputation will surely head south if you cut corners or try to get round the rules. There is much more than money at stake.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
You'll find lots to occupy your mind today, if you enjoy a challenge. But if you're the type who gets upset when nothing goes right you might want to stay in bed a few hours longer!

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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Your daily crossword and Sudoku answers from the play page.

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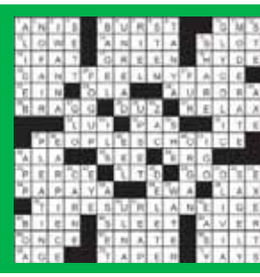

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